PLAYBOY'S HISTORY OF ASSASSINATION IN AMERICA

PART VI

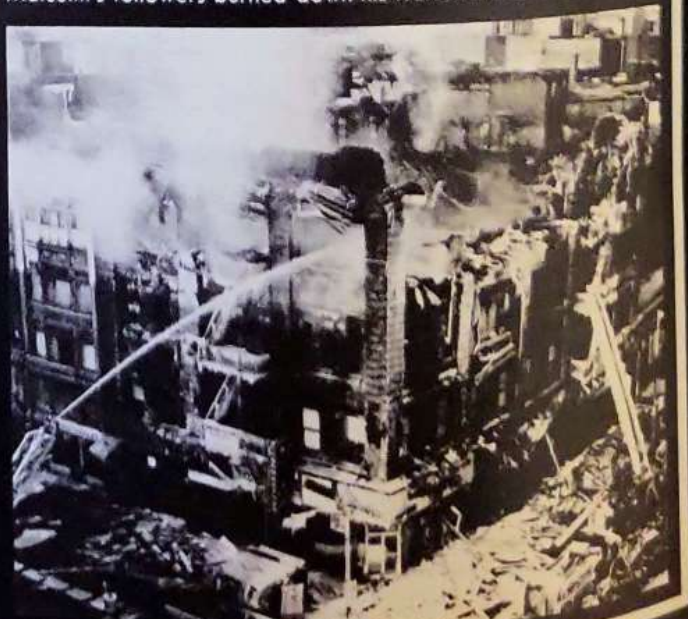
DEATH CROSSES THE COLOR LINE

article
By JAMES MCKINLEY

the sixties saw the death of our two major black leaders, both working to solve the same problems. malcolm x advocated violent solutions, martin luther king, jr., preached a doctrine of brotherhood, but they were both brought down by gunfire, and questions remain: did elijah muhammad have malcolm murdered? did james earl ray shoot king?

BLACK AGAINST BLACK

Malcolm X (above left), the first black victim of political assassination in America since John Kennedy's death, was a Black Muslim who had been suspended from the sect by its leader, Elijah Muhammad (above right). Three Black Muslims brutally gunned Malcolm down in 1965 using a shotgun and handguns. Above center: Moments after the fatal shots, friends vainly try to save Malcolm's life. Below left: Police remove his body. Certain that Elijah had ordered the killing, Malcolm's followers burned down his Harlem mosque (below right).



This thing with me will be resolved by death and violence.

—MALCOLM X

I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

—MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

JOHN KENNEDY'S unfathomable death created in many Americans a terrifying expectancy. If that could happen, anything was possible. We sensed that the potential for political murder had been only partially discharged with Kennedy. Somehow it was still suspended above the nation, a nearly palpable menace awaiting its moment. Who would be next, we wondered?

The answer surprised us. Our next two assassination victims were not, as always before, powerful white politicians. Instead, the assassins struck black reformers. Men, in fact, who in different ways—the one as incendiary, the other as dreamer—were protesting the injustices they believed white politicians had caused or tolerated.

The first to die, Malcolm X, put his bitterness succinctly. Of Kennedy's assassination he said, "Chickens coming home to roost never did make me sad: They've always made me glad." The chickens Malcolm had in mind were not just in ghettos; he felt they had also winged in from Southeast Asia and the Third World. It didn't matter that Kennedy at the time of his death was preparing wide-ranging civil rights legislation or that his inheritor, Lyndon Johnson, was sponsoring bills that in time would inspire some black leaders to hail him as the

"Longevity has its place," King said to a crowd the night before his death, "but I'm not concerned about that now. . . . So I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man." The next day, April 4, 1968, James Earl Ray (below) watched from his room about 200 feet away as King stood on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel, leaning over the railing, talking to friends. Moments later, at 6:01 P.M., Martin Luther King was dead.

Center right: In this 1956 photo, a black woman who was one of the first to ride in the front of the bus after the desegregation order sits next to Ralph Abernathy, longtime friend of King, who is just behind him. As civil rights marches grew, increasing attention (and hate) was focused on their leaders, especially King.

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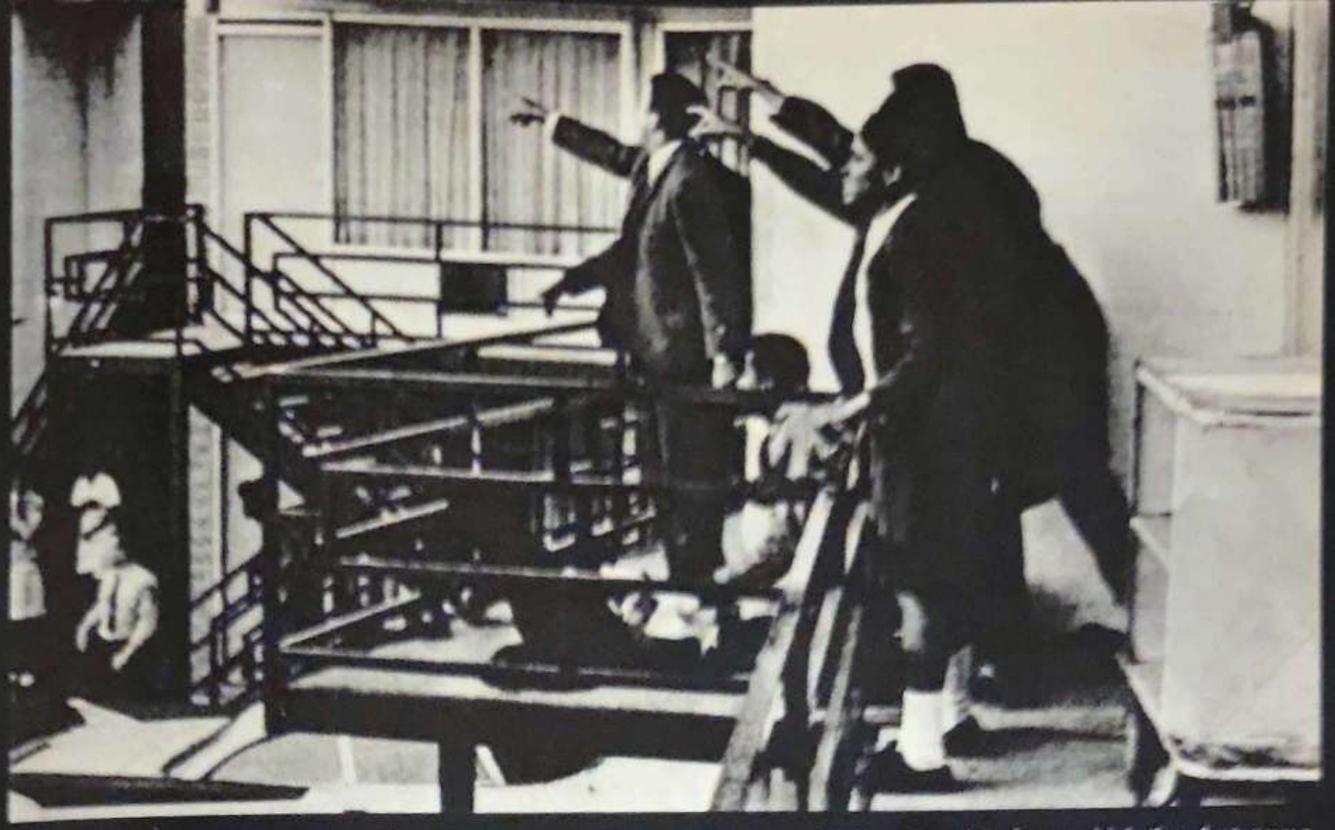

Moments after the fatal shot, King's aides point from the balcony in the direction from which the shot came. A slug from a .30-'06 rifle entered the right side of King's neck and went on to sever his spinal column. Fatally wounded, King lies among the helpless witnesses, a motel towel covering the right half of his face.

greatest civil rights President since Lincoln.

That was not enough for Malcolm, nor for King. They wanted justice now, freedom now. Like the preachers' sons they were, they exhorted their disciples to demand just that. But before they could see those demands met, each was dead and his cause soon faltered. Assassination had again removed a leader and deflected, perhaps thwarted, his movement. For those who kept faith with Malcolm and King, it was small comfort that the ultimate effects of their deaths were unknowable. Better to turn to assassination's only other constant, the questions of just who killed them and why.

With Malcolm it seemed simple. On Sunday afternoon, February 21, 1965, three men attacked him while he was addressing a congregation of his Organization of Afro-American Unity in the Audubon Ballroom, at 166th Street and Broadway, in New York. The assassins were well drilled. Two stood up about eight rows from the rostrum. "Don't be messin' with my pockets," one hollered, and while Malcolm asked them to cool it, his bodyguards moved toward them. Then smoke billowed from

King was buried in a plain wooden casket drawn through the streets by mules. Millions mourned and hundreds of thousands lined the streets . . .

. . . but just hours after King's death, hundreds of thousands, shocked and embittered, also took to the streets for another purpose: 125 cities were threatened by the riots and looting that followed the assassination.

a man's sock soaked in lighter fluid and set afire in the aisle. As Malcolm and his 400 followers stared at the confusion, a man rushed the stage with a sawed-off, double-barreled 12-gauge shotgun wrapped in a gray jacket. The blasts caught Malcolm in the chest, blowing him backward over a chair. Two other men moved up and pumped shot after shot from a .38 and a .45 into his body before all three ran to escape. Two made it, but a bodyguard's pistol felled one. The crowd outside broke his leg and would have killed him if police hadn't come to his rescue. They soon identified him as Talmadge Hayer, a.k.a. Thomas Hagan.

In the ballroom, Malcolm was dead. His pregnant wife, Betty Shabazz, wailed over his body, and another woman keened, "Oh, black folks, black folks, why you got to kill each other?" That was it, obviously. Malcolm's lieutenants were sure Elijah Muhammad had ordered the killing and that trained killers from the Fruit of Islam, the Black Muslim strike force, had carried it out. Fourteen months before, Elijah had suspended Malcolm from the Muslims, ostensibly for his remark about Kennedy, but really, they thought, because he feared the startling charisma of Malcolm, feared that Malcolm's new organization would attract more blacks than the Muslims and, above all, feared that Malcolm would tell what he knew about *sub rosa* Muslim activities.

Malcolm himself had thought the Muslims might kill him. They were responsible, he'd said, for the fire-bombing of his home just a week before he went to the Audubon. That was their gratitude for all he'd done. He'd built up the Muslim organization in New York. He'd enrolled their most famous recruit, the young heavyweight Cassius Clay. He'd articulated for them the black man's rage as no one had. "If ballots won't work, bullets will," he had once proclaimed, and now he feared he was to be the proof of that sentiment. That seemed ironic. He, born Malcolm Little, the man who in his youth was convinced that white racists had burned his home and killed his father, who as Big Red (for his reddish hair and light skin, the legacy of a "white rapist" grandfather) had gotten through *zoot* suits and processed hair, through dealing cocaine and grass, through burglary and six years in the slammer, where he'd learned about Islam and became converted, and then made it up close to Elijah's side, this man was now to be killed not by the "white devils" he excoriated but by his onetime brothers. Still, even Malcolm admitted they had reason. After he'd left the Muslims, he accused the 67-year-old Elijah of sexual promiscuity with teenage "secretaries" and declared he would, if threatened, tell everything he knew; for example, about deals the Muslims had made with the Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazi Party to separate contested territories into black and white spheres of influence. There were rumors, too, that Elijah's sect had, like the Klan, accepted money from H. L. Hunt, who likewise thought it a capital idea to keep black and white apart. Such revelations could badly damage the Muslims. "The die is set, and Malcolm shall not escape," Elijah opined. No wonder that Malcolm wrote, "Some of the followers of Elijah Muhammad would still consider it a first-rank honor to kill me."

It had apparently happened. Soon after the shooting, police arrested two Black Muslims as Hayer's accomplices. Thomas "15X" Johnson was eventually tried as the shotgunner. Norman "3X" Butler was charged with being the third gunman. Both had reputations as enforcers for the Muslims (at the time of Malcolm's assassination, Butler was out on $100,000 bond for shooting another Muslim defector). In 1966, the three were convicted of the murder and sentenced to life in prison. A rougher sort of justice moved faster than that. Within 36 hours of Malcolm's death, the Muslims' Mosque Number Seven in Harlem burned beyond repair, and for months after, Malcolm's allies publicly, if futilely, threatened to kill Elijah. But at least everyone agreed: The Muslims—possibly with outside encouragement—had assassinated Malcolm X.

That verdict still seems fair, even considering that no firm evidence ever led beyond the three convicted assassins (Elijah repeatedly denied any personal or organizational responsibility, but it is a well-known fact that the Fruit of Islam killers do not act on their own initiative).

Whatever the case, Malcolm X was dead. Many called that good riddance, remembering his hysterical rantings against whites, his calls for a separate black nation, his exhortations to blacks to buy guns and "get the white monkey off your back." Yet near the end, Malcolm seemed to have changed. He professed a new idealism. Trips abroad and a pilgrimage to Mecca had convinced him of the need for a brotherhood of all the oppressed, instead of war between the darker and the paler races. Ironically, that perception may also have helped doom Malcolm. A story had it that because of his visit, Moslems abroad had decided to give money to his organization instead of Elijah's, a prospect that could have provided the Muslims with another motive for removing Malcolm. Nevertheless, Malcolm persisted in saying the Muslim doctrine produced zombies. He said he was glad to be free of his hysteria, of "the sickness and madness of those days. . . . It's a time for martyrs now. And if I'm to be one, it will be in the cause of brotherhood." Unfortunately, he did not die in brotherhood's name but in a climate of violence that his early hatemongering may partially have made. Only his magnificent autobiography suggests what he might have become in other climes. Sadly, the violent weather was to hold, a fact deplored at the time of Malcolm's death by King, who ruefully said such violence "is not good for the image of our nation and not good for the Negro cause." That was three years before Memphis, where King became a genuine martyr to brotherhood.

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It was in Memphis, of course, that Martin Luther King and James Earl Ray came to be paired as saint and criminal in the pantheon of American assassinations. Yet, as with Lincoln and Booth, Kennedy and Oswald, there are vital questions surrounding that pairing, so many that we truly know only two things.

First, we know that at six P.M. on April 4, 1968, King leaned on the railing of the balcony of Memphis' Lorraine Motel into the sights of a .30-'06 rifle. One minute later, a bullet ripped through his right jaw and into his throat and body, killing him with a single shot that ended his dream of social equality, that burned Detroit and Washington, that launched a world-wide search for his killer and that eventually brought in a skinny, petty-criminal escaped convict and lifelong loser variously called Eric Starvo Galt, Harvey Lowmyer, John Willard, John Rayns, Paul E. Bridgman, Ramon George Sneyd, but known to us soon and ever since as James Earl Ray.

Second, we know that even if Ray did kill King—and there is reasonable doubt that it could be proved—he has been victimized, almost framed, by legal and judicial irregularities, the cover-up of important facts in the slaying and a failure by the FBI and Memphis police to investigate thoroughly the possibility of a conspiracy.

To understand those two things, we must begin with Martin Luther King. King was in Memphis to lead a protest march in support of Local 1733, the nearly all-black local of the garbage and sewer workers union. The 1300 men had gone on strike in February, asking for a 50-cent-an-hour raise, workmen's compensation insurance and an insurance program. Memphis officials refused. Inevitably, trouble built. The town seethed with race hate. Memphis' black leaders called for King, the Nobel apostle of nonviolence.

On March 18, 1968, King arrived from Anaheim, California, where he'd given a speech two days before. (Ray, then underground in Los Angeles, had noticed it.) In Memphis, King exhorted 15,000 people to join in a work stoppage. It happened, but the agent was a freak snowstorm, not aggrieved citizens. One plan frustrated, King consented to lead a march on March 28.

It was a disaster. Militant youths, the Invaders, broke King's nonviolent rules

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and some windows. They looted stores, touched off a riot in which police killed a 17-year-old boy. Cops moved in, plucked King and Ralph Abernathy and others out of the melee and took them to the fashionable Rivermont Motel. (During the recent revelations of FBI harassment of King, we found that the bureau discussed leaking the news that King was staying in a white establishment, to embarrass him. In turn, one of Ray's attorneys has speculated that the FBI really wanted to drive King out of the Rivermont to the Lorraine, where he could be more easily killed.) Anyway, things were more volatile than ever. Could King come back for a second march if they'd cool off the kids? King again agreed. They'd march on Friday, April fifth. Thus it was that King returned to Memphis from Atlanta on April third, and checked into the black-owned Lorraine Motel. Lots of people knew it, what with the TV and radio coverage. The next day, he was shot outside room 306.

The physical evidence proves no more than that Ray was involved in King's assassination—something he has admitted, asserting, "I personally did not shoot Dr. King, but I believe I may be partly responsible for his death." Furthermore, other evidence—which Ray's 1969 guilty plea (forced out of him by his lawyer, he says) prevented from being tried in a court—suggests a conspiracy as much as it does a lone killer. But in either case, King was at the Lorraine on April fourth. Where was Ray?

For a time, less than 300 feet away, in a rooming house on Main Street. The room—5B, in the north section of the double building—was a flophouse special featuring a chipped iron bedstead arched at each end like a leer. On the bed was the April fourth edition of the Memphis *Commercial Appeal*. In it was a report of King's speech the previous night, of his vow to march, and more, of an incandescent prophecy. "Some began to talk about the threats that were out, of what would happen to me from some of our sick white brothers. . . . Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop!" Then his people heard him say, "Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now," and then on, his voice building, until he shouted, his broad face varnished with sweat: "So I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. 'Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!' " The adulation washed over him. It must temporarily have cleansed him of the fear he'd recently admitted to close associates and friends, the fear that festered with every threat on his life since the first attempt in 1958, with every confrontation, with the fact of his surveillance by the FBI (and by the Memphis police, even now, as he spoke and, at the motel, from a fire station across the street). He may also have shed for the moment his correct suspicions that J. Edgar Hoover's animosity had led to illegal wire taps, to a letter suggesting that he commit suicide, to the gossip spread about his alleged sexual misbehavior.

All that is sure, though, is that the next day anyone in room 5B could push aside the gold-and-green-flowered plastic curtain and see the balcony fronting room 306 at the Lorraine. Ray may have looked there, for certainly he was in the room at times between 3:30 and 5:30 P.M. on April fourth. However, no one would have taken a shot at King from that window. You'd have to lean halfway out for any sort of accuracy. But there was a bathroom next door to 5B. From it, a man could get a clear diagonal shot across the weedy, bushy back yards and Mulberry Street, if he could get the rifle out the window and stand in the cratered bathtub, with one foot up on the edge of it. And if he weren't interrupted. In this rooming house, the toilet got a lot of use, as it does in places inhabited by heavy drinkers. One such, named Charles Quitman Stephens, lived directly next door, in 6B. Charley had seen Ray around 3:30 on the afternoon of the fourth, he later said, and he'd gone out into the hall when Mrs. Bessie Brewer, the manager, was showing that fellow 5B after he'd rejected a room without a view of the Lorraine. He told police and newsmen that he could also identify Ray as the neat, "sharp-faced" man whom he'd seen in the failing twilight running down the hall after the shot, carrying a bundle, running, he thought, from the bathroom, which had been locked at different times between 3:30 and the shooting. Oddly, his common-law mate, Grace Walden, said Charley had to be wrong, that the running man she'd seen through her doorway looked nothing like Ray and that Charley didn't see the man until he was clear down the hall, rounding the corner for the stairs.

Could it have been Ray? No one denies he *was* in the rooming house. Or that he had with him a .30-'06 Model 760 Remington Gamemaster slide-action rifle fitted with a Redfield 2 x 7 telescopic sight. About four o'clock, he'd bought a pair of Bushnell 7 x 35 binoculars at the York Arms Company a half mile away, perhaps for observing King. And the binoculars, along with the rifle (one spent casing in the chamber and *none* in the four-shot clip), several other .30-'06 cartridges, including five military rounds, a green-and-brown bedspread, a Browning rifle cardboard box, a 15″ x 20″ blue-plastic overnight case filled with toiletries, a white T-shirt (size 42–44), a pair of darned gray-and-white-paisley undershorts (size 34), a transistor radio, two cans of Schlitz, a pair of pliers, a tack hammer and *The Commercial Appeal* make up the famous "bundle of evidence" that Ray is said to have dropped in the doorway of the Canipe Amusement Company on Main Street after the fatal shot.

Ray—or, more properly, Ray as John Willard, the name he'd given Mrs. Brewer—also was in the bathroom. His palm print, the police said, was on the wall above the bathtub, where he'd leaned to get into the tub to take the shot. The scuffmarks of shoes were clearly visible in the tub, too, and there were identifiable Ray fingerprints on the rifle and scope. In room 5B, the FBI picked up fibers from the bedspread, as well as hair samples, the straps from the binocular case and other bits of physical evidence proving that Ray had been there.

Altogether, the weight of physical evidence against Ray seemed convincing. A week after the killing, the police and the FBI even found his 1966 white Mustang in Atlanta, loaded with clothes, a Polaroid camera and even a white sheet. The car was said to have been parked by Canipe's when King was killed. Ray was said to have used it to escape, driving from Memphis to Atlanta, before abandoning it in favor of a bus to Cincinnati, a train to Detroit, then on to Toronto, Montreal, a plane to London, then to Lisbon and back to London, where he was caught in June 1968. Authorities would prove it was Ray's car, after they proved it was Galt's and that Galt was Ray. Establishing that could not convict Ray, however, since he once affirmed he had purchased the car. Moreover, that indefatigable assassination researcher Harold Weisberg—a main force behind recent efforts to secure Ray a new trial—believes he has evidence showing puzzling things about the car. For example, it was almost bare of fingerprints, although there were several of Ray's left in Memphis. There were cigarette butts in the ashtray, but Ray didn't smoke. There was mud on the passenger's side, but Ray was supposedly alone. There was a white sheet on the back seat and some of the clothes didn't fit Ray. As we'll see in tracing alternate explanations for the crime, these items could be important.

But, to return to the car, it was odd that no all-points bulletin had been issued to stop a white Mustang. Guy Canipe said he had watched one roar past his door after he'd seen someone drop the bundle. The Tennessee State Police said they never got a request for an A.P.B., and the Memphis police said that was because they had no proof the "young white male, well dressed," in the white Mustang had killed King, even though, yes, they had at 6:08 broadcast a local

call to stop such a car. There were at least 400 white Mustangs in Memphis and, besides, after the killing, there was a phony C.B.-radio broadcast about a wild chase up in northeast Memphis with a white Mustang running away from a blue Pontiac, with three white men shooting at the Pontiac.

Police said that was a schoolboy prank and had come too late (at 6:35 P.M.) to be part of a conspiracy. It was interesting, though, that the broadcast diverted attention from the southern routes out of Memphis, which Ray admitted he took.

Besides the fingerprints and the car pointing to him, eyewitnesses identified Ray as the man who, on March 29 in Birmingham (fresh from Los Angeles via New Orleans, Selma, Birmingham and Atlanta), had purchased a .243 Remington Gamemaster, had ordered it fitted with a 2 x 7 variable-power scope, had bought some cartridges and had given his name and address as Harvey Lowmyer, 1807 South 11th Street, Birmingham. The next day, though, Lowmyer took the rifle back to the Aeromarine Supply Company and asked for a heavier one, a .30-'06, because his "brother" had said the .243 wasn't big enough for the hunting they planned to do in Wisconsin. The clerk, Don Wood, gave Lowmyer the same Remington model in a .30-'06, fitted it with the scope, exchanged cartridges and put everything into a Browning rifle box, because the scope made the rifle too wide for the Remington box. Lowmyer seemed grateful, Wood said. So was the FBI, since through the rifle and Wood they could identify Lowmyer, Galt, Willard and Ray as the murderer, because hadn't that .30-'06 killed King?

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James Earl Ray was the kind of man for whom Martin Luther King spoke. Poor. Pissed off. Imprisoned in a world he never made. From the beginning on March 10, 1928, until now, in the Tennessee State Prison, Ray's life taught him to get before you're gotten. His father was a shiftless sort, a menial laborer, good mostly for siring nine children with Ray's hapless mother before leaving her so she could complete an ugly ruin with alcohol. The Ray children grew up in an agony of embarrassment and poverty. Eventually, Jimmy and his brothers Jerry and John became criminals. One sister was mentally ill. Even so, as a teenager, Jimmy Ray seemed to have a nail-hanging hold on America's vertical mobility. He learned the leather-dyeing trade in Alton, Illinois, and was neat, shy with girls, polite, reliable and frugal as hell. Then, when World War Two ended, he lost that job and six weeks later joined the Army (on the enlistment form, he said his father was dead). After basic, he became an MP in Germany (and, some say, admired the defeated Hitler's racial policies), an occupation that didn't inhibit considerable boozing, a little dope, lots of fighting and trouble. In December 1948, Ray was discharged for "lack of adaptability to military service."

From then until he was arrested for the King murder, Ray was a Sammy Glick of the nether world, scrambling for all he was worth. If he ever heard anything like the messages of peace and brotherhood coming from a black Baptist minister and his son Martin in Atlanta, his 20-year record of petty crime does not show it.

If Ray shot King, it was a complete break from his history of smalltime thievery. King was killed by a rifle bullet. In his stick-ups, Ray had sometimes brandished a pistol, but he'd never fired it. After his escape from the Missouri penitentiary, he carried a pistol, was captured with one on him. But, other than in his Army basic training 22 years before, there's no evidence that he used a rifle. Why would he choose one to kill King? It's been suggested that in prison, Ray was entranced by Oswald's feat, that maybe he went to school on it and decided on a long-range murder for a troublemaker he hated. George McMillan, a writer whose forthcoming book assumes Ray's guilt, quotes men in stir with Ray as saying he was rabid about "Martin Luther Coon" and vowed to get him. McMillan also claims Ray's brother Jerry said that Jimmy, who often contacted Jerry after his escape, was wild for Wallace and that on the morning of King's assassination, he got a call during which Jimmy said, "Big Nigger has had it." (Jerry has denied this statement.) McMillan further says that Ray financed his postescape peregrinations with money made in prison and sent outside to Jerry, about $7000 in all.

How much of this is incontrovertible? The escape itself—Abernathy thinks "Ray may have been let loose" to kill King—*was* peculiarly successful for Ray. He hid in a box carrying loaves of bread, was trucked outside the walls and then left the truck (the authorities put out a routine $50-reward leaflet, but it had someone else's fingerprints on it—another detail that suggested to some that Ray had been let out, maybe that he wasn't supposed to be caught). But other attempts hadn't gone so well.

Convicts at the Missouri penitentiary this writer has interviewed said Ray was laughable in those adventures, once playing the "mole" and hiding in ventilators, only to crawl out hours later into a guard's arms. Another time, he tried to scale a wall with a pole but fell back into the yard and hurt himself. (After the King affair, when Ray was finally transferred out of solitary in Nashville to the

"I don't know when I've been involved in a better doctor-patient-nurse relationship."

maximum-security Brushy Mountain prison, he again tried to escape. This time he hid in a steam tunnel and got scalded out; he had picked the wrong tunnel—the other one in the yard led outside.) As for his wheeling and dealing at Missouri, one fellow inmate said, "He was the kind of guy who'd bring in ten dollars' worth of dope and sell it for twenty. This is while some guys are making ten grand a year in pills." Other convicts have said Ray made plenty.

Was Ray the kind of con who could plan and execute the King murder, then escape to three foreign countries? It's true you can learn a lot inside the walls about new identities and passports. In the months before King's death, Ray did travel in Canada and Mexico, as well as extensively in the United States. Yet before, he always had been a bungler. Dropping evidence at Canipe's would be his style, but eluding all the FBI agents would not. Perhaps, then, he was so deeply motivated by racism that he became inspired. Certainly, both in prison and out, Ray exhibited deep inferiority feelings, which he tried to allay through weight lifting, dance lessons, bartending lessons, hypnosis lessons, even plastic surgery, which changed the distinctive shape of his nose, and maybe they finally all worked to make him more confident and efficient. (Or, some suspect, such activities were simply aids to the new identity he needed after killing King.)

But was Ray a racist? His brothers admit they are. Jerry openly displayed his feelings, once working for J. B. Stoner, a hypermisanthropic Klansman who helped form the black-hating National States Rights Party and whom he tried to retain as a lawyer for Jimmy after Ray's guilty plea netted him 99 years. As for Jimmy, he refused to live in the integrated "honor" dormitory at Leavenworth. While loose in Los Angeles, he volunteered in March 1968 to work for Wallace (Jerry, again, supposedly said Jimmy thought if King were out of the way, Wallace could more easily be elected). He had a barroom fight over "niggers" there, and also wrote for information on immigrating to Rhodesia. A John Birch leaflet (along with a map, complete with Ray's thumbprint, on which were marked the locations of King's church and home) was found in a room in Atlanta allegedly rented by Ray just before the killing. And in England, after the assassination, Ray reportedly made inquiries about signing on as a mercenary in Rhodesia or the Congo. Yet those facts, however suggestive, don't prove Ray killed for race reasons. A man who spent seven years in the Missouri penitentiary with him has a different feeling about that:

"I'd say he was about as close to me as he was to anybody, which wasn't too close. He was an extreme introvert. He didn't mix . . . he was only interested in gettin' out. Any fucking way he could . . . he couldn't stand the lockup, he hated it. Time drove his shit, just to speak frankly. You know about King, let's assume that Ray was down South . . . well, he goes on down there and he talks to two or three politicians, who are pretty influential people, and they could probably convince me that they could get me out of it or get me out of the country. A guy gets pretty fucking desperate out there on escape, you know. In my opinion [if Ray did kill King], it wasn't out of any racist motive. If he was a racist, I can honestly say I never heard this guy, not one time did I ever hear him say one word about or against a black man or a nigger. Not one time. He wasn't hostile, but now, man, you knew it was there. His smile came easily. But he had a temper. That great little ingratiating smile was pretty superficial."

If Ray did kill King, what was his motive? There are several answers. The first is Ray's own, most of which he sold after his arrest to an Alabama writer named William Bradford Huie for money to pay for his defense (Huie's publication of much of Ray's tale in *Look* before the trial date would these days be considered prejudicial, a point stressed in Ray's petitions for a new trial).

This account—documented in I-followed-Ray's-footprints style—portrays a bold and ingenious criminal who comes to the bad end of being framed by a mysterious man called Raoul. (Huie himself first believed that story of conspiracy, but then concluded Ray had done it by himself.) The story admits most of what the state of Tennessee would try to prove, differing only in the crucial detail of where Ray was when King was murdered. On that point, in fact, Ray has switched several times, as we'll see. But the rest was clear in his mind.

We track Ray as he escaped on April 23, 1967, and probably with his brother John's help made his way to Chicago (McMillan believes that the next day, Jimmy told John and Jerry he was going to kill King). He worked for two months in a restaurant kitchen. To his employers, this slim, quiet man was John Rayns, a model employee who didn't seem at all to mind the Negroes he worked around. When he quit in late June, the owners were sorry to see him go, but they wished him well at his new job in Canada.

But Ray didn't go directly to Canada. With $450 and a $200 Chrysler—whose title, with his temporary driver's license, gave him a bit of tenuous I.D.—he went to the St. Louis area, where brother John had a saloon. When the Chrysler broke down, he sold it and bought a $200 red Plymouth.

In Canada, Ray/Rayns became Eric Starvo Galt. Huie believes Ray chose the name after passing the city of Galt, between Detroit and Toronto. However, there is an Eric St. Vincent Galt in Toronto, a writer, whose middle initials, St. V., when scrawled in signature, look like Starvo. Did Ray get that odd name there and, if so, why and where was he looking at Galt's signature? (It's possible he sought out Galt's signature as he later, after King's death, supposedly sought out Canadians who resembled him and whose names he could use in getting a passport.)

Anyway, he first headed for Montreal, where he hoped to find a Canadian citizen to act as guarantor of a passport that he could use to get someplace "from which I could never be extradited." (He didn't know then that his prison information was out of date: Canadian law no longer required such a guarantor.) He also needed money. To get it, he told Huie, he robbed a whorehouse on July 18, though he later admitted it had been a supermarket.

After the robbery, Ray bought all sorts of glad rags, sent for some sex manuals, enrolled in a locksmithing correspondence course and went to the exclusive Gray Rocks Inn in the Laurentian Mountains, where he met and seduced a beautiful Canadian divorcee who he hoped would swear he was a Canadian citizen. Ray admits all this, but he adds "Raoul." And Raoul is all. If he exists, the conspiracy exists. Ray himself said he hung around "the boats" in Montreal, looking for a way out of the country. He frequented a waterfront tavern called the Neptune. He says there he put out word that he might be available for nefarious goings on, if fairly riskless, since he needed capital and an I.D. One day, a sandy-haired, mid-30ish French Canadian named Raoul showed up, saying he might have some things for Galt to do, just little things at first, mind you, but then more and bigger, ending with lots of cash and all the papers Galt might need to get away to places with no extradition treaty with the U.S.; say, Rhodesia or wherever.

And so, Ray says, began the association with Raoul that continued sporadically over the next eight months, until he told Ray to meet him in Memphis on April fourth on Main Street, where, Ray says, Raoul or somebody else must have killed King.

Does Raoul exist? The prosecution said no, that Ray was a loner. No Raoul, just Ray suddenly turned clever, and if their sole eyewitness, Charles Stephens, couldn't exactly say it *was* Ray he'd seen running down the hall—and his mate had said no, the man was blond, stocky, older than Ray, in an Army jacket and plaid shirt—look at all the circumstances.

Circumstances that, if true, unreel like a cops-and-robbers movie scripted by Ray but subtitled by his accusers, their alternate versions winding down to the shot

that blew away King. The star, James Earl Ray, begins:

> I'm Eric Starvo Galt in August 1967, smuggling packages—heroin?—for Raoul into the U.S., modest fee, $750, then being told to sell the old Plymouth and go to Birmingham, Alabama, where Raoul would meet me, get the better I.D., give me money, a suitable car, and if I needed Raoul, here was a New Orleans telephone number. He said there was $12,000 in it eventually, and it was risky in the U.S., but things hadn't worked out with the passport.

No, the opponents say, not that way. He went alone to Chicago and signed the Plymouth over to Jerry, and then went by train to Birmingham, where he took dance lessons, lived in a rooming house, bought the white Mustang for $2000 cash, got a Galt driver's license, bought surveillance-style photo equipment, movie stuff, just living there until October sixth.

Raoul met me in Birmingham. We bought the car after I found it and he OK'd it. He gave me $500 to live on and $500 for camera equipment he described to me, told me to lie low and stay out of trouble. I got Galt I.D. for driver's license and car registration.

Uh-uh. Ray was living on his prison earnings and robbery money and probably wanted those cameras—he bought a Polaroid, too—for pornography, to make money. He was just indulging himself, building up his self-importance, and he probably really liked being in Wallace country.

I left Birmingham October sixth and went to Nuevo Laredo, where Raoul met me, and we smuggled a tire full of something across the border, and he gave me $2000 in 20s and said he'd need me for other jobs, to keep in touch via that New Orleans number, why not stay in Mexico awhile? And I said fine, there or Los Angeles.

Bull! Ray just lazed about in Mexico, mostly Puerto Vallarta, making it with three whores, posing as a writer, setting up to smuggle a bunch of grass into California.

I'd like to go back there when I get out; it was good; I even proposed marriage to a woman named Irma, but it didn't work, so I left with some marijuana but got rid of it before crossing the border.

He took it into L.A. by himself and those halcyon days were spent as much as anything else with that Polaroid, photographing himself, because he was obsessed with wanting to be one of the Ten Most Wanted criminals, with his picture in all the post offices; he was so insecure, see, like Oswald, and he was studying his photos so he could get his prominent feature—the end of his nose—altered by plastic surgery, so when the great crime occurred, he couldn't be recognized.

Sure, I stayed in L.A. from November 18, 1967, until March 17, 1968. Had two apartments at different times and took bartending and dancing lessons, because if I lived in South America, they'd come in handy. Stuck with the locksmithing. Applied for two jobs but didn't have a Social Security card. Tried to learn about self-hypnosis; that's where those self-improvement books I had in England came from. Told the telephone company I was a Wallace worker so I'd get a phone quick to use looking for a job. Had trouble over race with some people in a bar called the Rabbit's Foot.

Hell, he told them since they loved niggers so much, he'd take 'em on down to Watts and see how they liked it. And he inquired about going to Africa. The hypnosis was strange; he actually gave that hypnotist his real name, since he believed he'd tell the truth when hypnotized, anyway.

I left for New Orleans December 15, after Raoul wrote to me at General Delivery, saying come for a conference, they had a job for me. Charley Stein rode with me—he's the cousin of a girl I met—to take his sister's kids back to L.A. The ride was a favor, but I made them register for Wallace before we left. Anyway, I saw Raoul and he told me to be ready for a job in two or three months, hinted that there was some big businessman involved. He gave me another $500 in 20s.

Typical lie. He went because he was into some solo dope deal and Charley Stein's saying he made several long-distance calls to New Orleans along the way doesn't change it, since he always kept in touch with Jerry, anyway, so maybe the calls weren't to New Orleans. And Raoul never wrote to him. He decided to go the night before they left, because he called that morning and canceled his appointment with the hypnotist, so again, no Raoul.

On March fifth, I had the tip of my nose cut off so I couldn't be recognized in any of those deals, because Raoul wrote in February and said the deal was on for about May first, the one we'd talked about, running guns, so I was to meet him in New Orleans about March 20 and finally I'd get the 12 grand and papers.

Sure, that was about when he decided to kill King; it was building in him, all the Wallace hatred, the desire to make the top ten, and Ray had heard enough when King was in L.A. March 16 and 17 and he'd had the nose job, so he stayed out his rent like the tightwad he was and took off to go find King and shoot him.

That's the way it is for each and the frames click madly as Galt leaves L.A. He drove to New Orleans, got word there to meet Raoul next in Birmingham, except, he vows, he got lost and had to spend the night of March 22 in Selma (Wrong! the accusers say; you were stalking King, who had been in Selma); then on to Birmingham and Raoul and then to Atlanta to that dumpy rooming house, where we heard about the gun deal (No! You were alone and after King, marking his haunts those days on a map) . . . then faster, faster, the images melting . . . I bought the .243 and then exchanged it, like Raoul told me, in Birmingham the 29th and 30th (You did it alone!), and then went by slow stops to Memphis, just me, with this gun they were going to use for a sample, Raoul said, for the buyers in Memphis who'd take that kind and hundreds of cheap foreign rifles (Sorry! You went back to Atlanta for King but found he would be in Memphis on April fourth, so you went the third). . . . No, no, Raoul met me near Memphis in a Mississippi motel on the second and took the rifle and told me to go to Memphis on the third and stay at the Rebel motel (Yes, you did, but you got there the third, signed in—we have your handwriting—and found where King was and went the next day to kill him). . . . No, Raoul came to room 5B with the gun (But Mrs. Brewer doesn't remember anyone asking where Mr. Willard's room was) and I went to South Main, I've told you, and bought the binoculars, and about five o'clock he sent me out for some beer so they could make the deal, and I went to Jim's Grill downstairs (You can't describe the place and no one remembers you there), and then I was on the sidewalk and heard this shot and here came Raoul and dumped the bundle and jumped in the car and covered himself with that white sheet and we took off, then stopped a few blocks away and Raoul jumped out, the last I saw of him, and I was scared and took off (You say that? Why, then, did you through your lawyers change your story later and say you were at a filling station with the Mustang, getting a low tire checked?). OK, I made up that sheet business and told it to Huie because I was scared, trapped, Huie was pressing me to confess so his book would sell, but I can prove it, there's a filling-station attendant and some others who'll say they remembered the car and

"Tell me all about yourself.
What kind of work do you do? Where did you go to school?
How long do you last in bed?"

me, at about six o'clock; no, I didn't kill King, didn't fire that shot.

And then, freeze frame of King falling.

•

Every scene after that is anticlimactic, though fascinating. Ray admits he drove alone to Atlanta the night of April fourth and abandoned his car. He then returned to Canada, arriving in Toronto on the eighth. He lived again in rooming houses, in which he read of the riots, the grief, the universal condemnation of King's murder (if Ray or someone else had expected most of America to applaud, he was disheartened). Ray says he was fleeing in fear that Raoul and those who had set him up would now come and kill him, that he hadn't even known King was dead until he heard it on his Mustang's radio.

Fleeing he certainly was, and in ways the prosecution said were con-wise and the conspiracy buffs say are sure signals he had help. Again, he needed money and an I.D., however he got them. Ray has said he went to the library and looked up several Toronto births for 1932, finally choosing two names and, giving his rooming-house address, applied for birth certificates in their names—Paul E. Bridgman and Ramon George Sneyd. He picked 1932 to approximate his age and, to verify a general resemblance, he floated around in their neighborhoods and made sure they were of medium height, medium weight, dark-haired. A clever scheme. Too clever for Ray, the conspiracy theorists say, especially since Sneyd—in whose name Ray easily got a passport through a travel agent—was a policeman, and did not that imply an international conspiracy? Some people wonder, too, about Bridgman's story that he got a call from someone who said he was checking to see if he had a passport. But Ray says he did that.

In any event, on May sixth, Ray as Sneyd flew to London on a $345 21-day excursion ticket. He cashed in the return ticket and went on to Lisbon, there to try to escape to Angola as a mercenary. It was none too soon; by then the world knew that Galt, Lowmyer and Willard were really James Earl Ray. His picture had been in the papers and police of several countries had been alerted (if, as the prosecution says, it was fame he sought, he must have been gratified). Even so, it had taken the FBI a long time—until April 19—to identify Ray, despite the mound of evidence at Canipe's. In fact, it hadn't been until April 18, after agents came upon Ray's room in Atlanta and his thumbprint on the map, that they started checking the fingerprint files of Federal offenders. Ray's fingerprints were there because of his money-order caper. Of the 53,000 cards, his was the 700th up. Lucky FBI. But why hadn't they immediately checked the serial number on the transistor radio left in the bundle? They'd have found that Ray had bought it in the Missouri pen and that would have told the bureau who had dropped all the stuff. Maybe then he would have been picked up sooner. Or did someone not want him picked up, as many have asked?

Yet he was picked up. There was nothing for Ray in Portugal, except beer and whores, so he went back to England on May 17. Apparently almost broke, Ray on June fourth robbed a savings bank of $240. On the eighth, he went to Heathrow for a flight to Brussels, but there Detective Sergeant Phillip Birch of Scotland Yard, on the lookout for someone using Sneyd's passport with Ray's picture in it, brought his hand down firmly on Ray's shoulder. It was over. Ray handed over his cheap .38 and was taken to prison, where one man reported he uttered some of the few pitiable words anyone ever heard him say: "Oh, God, I feel so trapped."

That was true, in many ways. Take the judicial irregularities as one dimension of Ray's dilemma. His extradition from England—to which he agreed upon advice of counsel, though he could have declared King's murder a political act and so avoided extradition—was based on the questionable affidavit of Charles Stephens' and the inconclusive ballistics and firearms evidence. Ray's return to the United States and subsequent imprisonment were of dubious legality and constitutionality and showed how scared the Government was running. The return was accomplished in an Air Force C-135, with Ray strapped to a seat and surrounded by inquisitive Government cops. He was then stripped, searched, manacled and transferred, in an armored truck, to the Shelby County Jail, where, for eight months, he lived in a special cell section that was continuously floodlighted, monitored by TV and shuttered from the sense of day and night by quarter-inch steel plates.

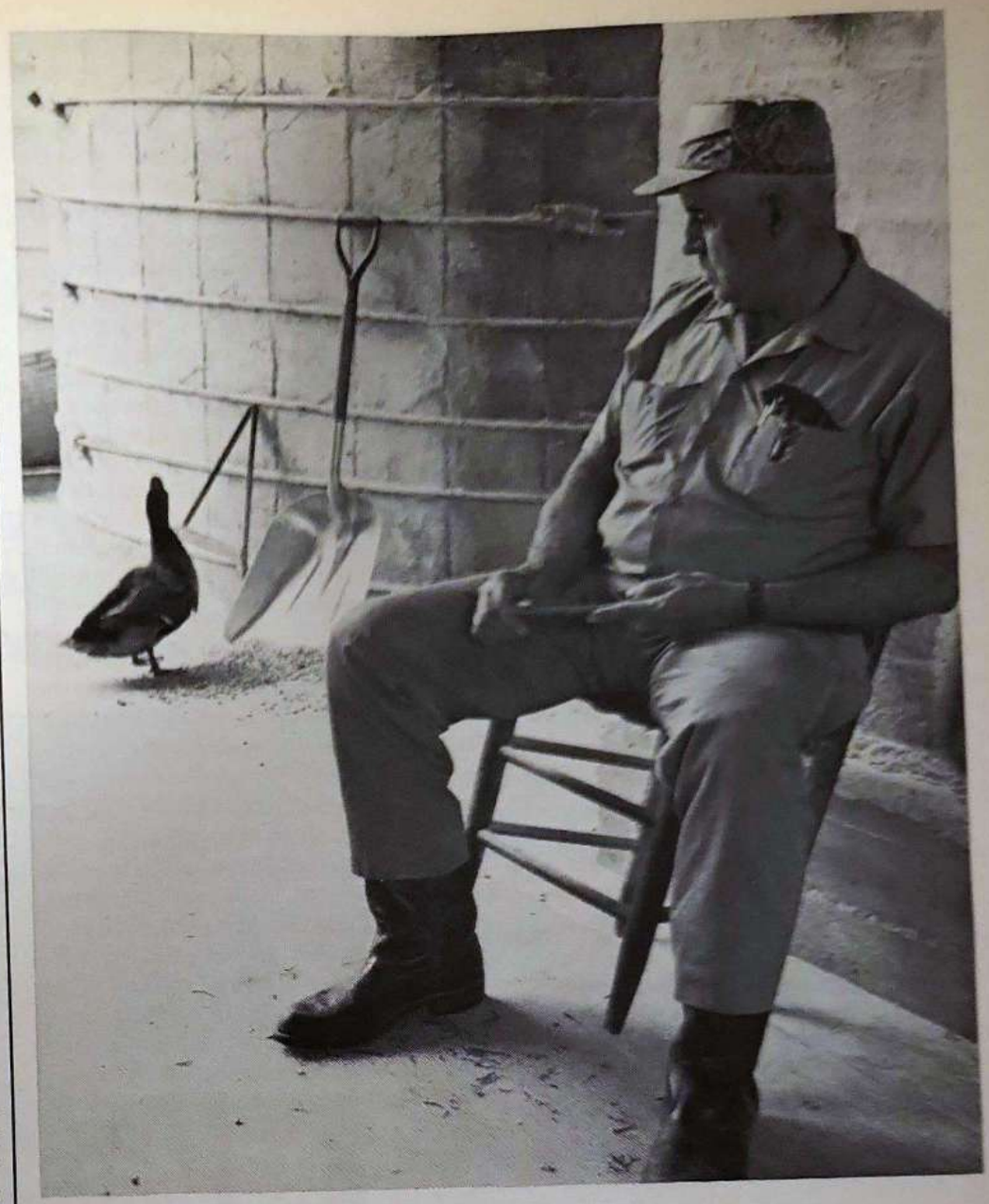
Attorneys have been a problem for Ray, one he has exacerbated by his jailhouse lawyering. He first wanted F. Lee Bailey (an index of his sense of importance), but when Bailey declined, he got Arthur Hanes, Sr., the mayor of Birmingham back in the Bull Connor, cattle-prod, fire-hose and sick-the-dogs-on-the-niggers days. Hanes is a good lawyer. He successfully defended the Klannish killers of Viola Liuzzo and he maintains he could have done the same for Ray. He and his son investigated Ray's story as much as they could in preparing the case, and both thought it possible there had been a conspiracy. But it wasn't the key to their defense. They had detected large holes in the state's circumstantial evidence and they would attack those. But Ray fired

the Haneses in November 1968, two days before his trial was to start.

The reasons are uncertain. Cynics think he did it to postpone the trial until George Wallace could be elected that month and then pardon him. More probably, the reasons lie, as Ray has said, in the Catch-22 agreement under which Hanes worked. Hanes actually was paid by Huie, who was financing Ray's defense by gathering and publishing stories that indicated Ray was guilty. Thus, Ray may have decided that Huie *needed* him guilty, since much of the big-bucks potential for his articles and his book depended on their being an inside story. So couldn't Huie accordingly influence his partner's, Hanes's, conduct of the trial? Jerry Ray, for example, testified he told Jimmy that Huie offered him $12,000 to get Jimmy to stay off the stand; i.e., not to say he was innocent when Huie had decided he was guilty. So Jimmy decided to fire Hanes.

For their parts, both Hanes and Huie have opined that's nonsense. Hanes says he had a fine case and Huie says a fair trial would have helped his book, no matter what the result (as it was, Ray's guilty plea obviated a trial and turned Huie's book into a big loser).

Whatever the truth, Ray got his postponement, and into the case at Jerry Ray's behest strode Percy Foreman, the famous Texas criminal lawyer who boasted he'd won more cases than Clarence Darrow, had lost only one killer to the electric chair, and that was just because his fees were punishment enough for any criminal. Now the fur would fly. Except that several things happened. First, Foreman found that Huie was the money man and, like Hanes, promptly struck a deal with the Huie-Ray-Hanes literary enterprise for his fee, supposedly $150,000. Second, he says he then found that the state had a terrific case (Hanes violently disagrees, saying Foreman never even *looked* at Hanes's files) and so Ray was going to the electric chair unless he pleaded guilty. Third, the famous trial lawyer appeared in court in March 1969 with his sheepish client and instead of a furious legal battle, the onlookers saw the *pro forma* rigmarole of Ray's agreeing with the 55 stipulations the state had marshaled that said James Earl Ray alone had killed Martin Luther King. Was Mr. Ray guilty? "Yes, legally guilty, uh-huh," came Ray's reply. That was that, except for a potentially exhilarating moment that died a-borning when Ray rose up and said no, he just couldn't agree with Ramsey Clark and Mr. Hoover that there hadn't been a conspiracy. Nothing more was said. Foreman immediately left Memphis, taking with him the $9000 remaining from Huie's original $40,000 in payments to Hanes through Ray. He left



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behind several questions. Was it true, as Ray claimed, that Foreman had coerced him into the guilty plea—"You'll bar-be-cue, boy!"—even put pressure on Ray's family to influence Jimmy to cop a plea? Why hadn't Foreman spent more time on the case? (He was with Ray only one hour and 53 minutes in the first 70 days of preparing the defense, though he saw him more often in the days preceding the plea, the better to railroad him, Ray's advocates think.) Had Huie convinced Foreman that Ray was dead guilty (it's true Huie was summoned by the grand jury—some of Ray's recent lawyers suspect that he further incriminated their client then) and so called Foreman off? Was it true, therefore, that Foreman had not, as other lawyers have since alleged, provided adequate counsel for Ray? Finally, was Ray's accusation—related by John Ray—justified that Foreman had told him the trial judge would grant no more continuances, even if Ray fired Foreman, and, therefore, that he had no choice but to plead guilty, unless he wanted to be left only with the public defender as counsel?

Three days after his guilty plea, Ray wrote to the trial judge, asking for a new trial, consistent with Tennessee law. Ray's request was rejected because the trial judge had died of a heart attack, which, under Tennessee statute, put Ray's request within another judge's jurisdiction. He denied a new trial. Since then, Ray has kept trying through a succession of lawyers, including the racist Stoner, to secure a new trial on the murder charge (and to secure compensation for allegedly libelous statements published by Huie and others). The grandest attempt came in October 1974, at a U. S. district court evidentiary hearing that had been ordered by a U. S. court of appeals. Largely based on the arguments of attorney James Lesar—the hardest-working of Ray's recent lawyers—the court found that Ray's judicial record reeked with "ethical, moral and professional irregularities" and that "Ray's attorneys, Hanes and Foreman, were more interested in capitalizing on a notorious case than in representing the best interests of their client." But in February 1975, despite the success Ray's defense team had in introducing vital questions on the evidence, the court ruled against the petition. An appeal is pending. And so are the vital questions.

We've seen the weakness of Charles Stephens' identification of Ray as the man in the rooming house. (The police, by the way, sequestered Stephens after the killing, providing him with bed and booze, while his wife, Grace, was put away in a state mental hospital, still contending that Charley was wrong.) If more were needed to impeach Stephens' testimony, Ray's lawyers interviewed a taxi driver named James McCraw who said that on April fourth he had been dispatched to 422½ Main Street to pick up Charley "about 5:30" and found him too drunk to walk, so he had left. McCraw also told a defense investigator, Weisberg, that he had double-parked in front of Jim's Grill—where, in one of Ray's stories, Ray was sent by Raoul to get beer—and had seen no white Mustang on the street (which fits Ray's second story about being away from the place altogether). Further, a newsman supposedly saw Grace and Charley at police headquarters on the evening of April fifth, and Charley was too drink-sodden to say why he was there. All of this leads skeptics to think Stephens may have been encouraged to perjure himself.

We have, too, the suggestive but inconclusive ballistics data: a slug that, according to the FBI, was only "consistent with" a .30-'06 (a slug that, despite its mutilation, might, according to some experts, have been matched to the rifle) allegedly fired from an awkward position. Indeed, a criminologist active in assassination inquiries—Herbert MacDonnell—told the Federal court that it would have been impossible with the 42-inch-long Gamemaster to stand in the tub and get the needed angle on King, that to do so the rifle's butt would have to be six inches *within* the wall. Impossible, that is, if the rifle made the prosecution's dent, a semicircular indentation in the bathroom window's inner sill that the state claims was made for the rifle barrel. Unfortunately for MacDonnell, you can aim from the tub if you put the rifle far enough out the window.

Whatever, the FBI's own documents show there are no splinters torn from the sill or powder marks on it as there would have been if the barrel had rested in the dent. It's conceivable that the dent was made by a hammer. It has also been suggested that the window in the sniper's nest was not open at the time of the shot and, furthermore, that an object sat on the window sill that was substantial enough to prevent a rifle from being shoved through the window and knocking a screen to the ground, as the state maintains. The shot simply had to come from elsewhere, according to Ray's advocates. (However, trajectory studies indicate the shot did come from the bathroom.)

If those contentions sound like some advanced by doubters of the Warren Report, so do the musings on the weapon itself. Why, for example, was the .243 exchanged for the .30-'06? The .243 is a splendid sniper's weapon, with a high velocity and a flatter trajectory than the .30-'06. The prosecution believes the exchange was made because the .243 had a flaw in the chamber and so the cartridges couldn't be smoothly loaded. Ray's defenders say that's absurd, that anyone as familiar with rifles as the state assumes Ray was could have used an emery board to smooth the imperfection. No, the exchange was made because those who were framing Ray were going to use a .30-'06 and so needed a matching weapon. And one loaded with their

"Julia's assertiveness training is really paying off—she was just arrested for aggravated assault."

patsy's fingerprints. The inveterate skeptic Weisberg points out that a .30-'06 Gamemaster was stolen from a Memphis sporting-goods store shortly before the assassination. Others have opined that choosing a Gamemaster was not consistent with such a masterful frame-up. Why pick a distinctive pump-action high-powered rifle rather than a more common bolt-action weapon? No, they say, the choice—like Oswald's—was that of a lone and inexperienced killer. (Some wonder, too, if Raoul's alleged gun buyers would want pump-action guns for paramilitary use.)

The last speculations about the weapon and its effects also remind us of the John Kennedy case. Why were there five full-jacketed military .30-'06 rounds found among the hollow-point hunting cartridges in the bundle of evidence? Ignoring the supposition that these mean the Government was involved (military .30-'06 rounds are widely available), we can ask which sort of cartridge killed King. Weisberg's suits under the Freedom of Information Act have unearthed documents that he says prove the FBI has covered up or distorted important facts about that. Their spectrographic tests, Weisberg claims, show only one kind of metal on King's clothing, whereas hollow points are alloys of several metals. On the other hand, the FBI report may really be on a fragment from another kind of round, which would imply *two* bullets. As of today, though, the autopsy physician continues to say there was only one bullet.

Even so, there are peculiarities. Was the assassin so confident—more even than Oswald—that he would have chambered only one round? Some say no clip was *in* the rifle found at Canipe's, though one was in the box. The state believes that Ray, the bungling sniper, saw King come out suddenly, was surprised, jammed one round home, ran to the bathroom and shot. But assuming Ray alone did the killing, and assuming he carefully chose his sniper's nest, perhaps by walking down Main, seeking a flophouse overlooking the Lorraine, why would he not have the clip in his rifle? The state says he had been there since about 3:30. He'd taken his bag with him. Wouldn't a dedicated racist assassin be *prepared* to kill King? Or, if he were expecting a quick job, one shot, why would his spread, zippered bag and all the rest be with him instead of in the Mustang?

Could he even have packed up all that gear and escaped in the time available? Ray's defenders have long said they didn't see how he could have run from the bathroom, put the rifle in the box, wrap it and the overnight bag in the spread, run down the hall and the stairs, drop the bundle, get into his car and drive away when there were cops all over the place, many of them in the fire station on the corner, then also serving as a police observation post. Besides, Ray's defense team says, a Lieutenant J. E. Ghormley was on Main Street in time to see Ray escape, if Ray had done it. Before the shot, Ghormley was in the fire station with the crews from three Tactical Action Cruisers. When King fell, police rushed from the fire station toward the Lorraine, but Ghormley was impeded by a bad leg. He decided not to jump down from the wall above Mulberry Street, then thought of the sniper's possible location and walked briskly to South Main, where he found the bundle, questioned Canipe and, with his walkie-talkie, radioed an alert for the young man in a white car. In a recent reconstruction for CBS, it was said Ghormley took three minutes to get to Canipe's. Previously, however, he had estimated it could have taken no more than a minute. Defense attorneys have duplicated Ghormley's movements in less than a minute. Ray could have escaped in three minutes but not in one. And whichever time applies, Ghormley saw nothing on the street. No car, no man, only the bundle in the doorway. He also says he saw nothing in the parking lot next to Canipe's. That fact, put next to perplexing and contradictory statements by Canipe, has led some of Ray's advocates to an alternate version of what might really have happened.

They hypothesize that the real assassins were in that parking lot. Two of them, a hit man and a wheelman, in another white Mustang. Ray had already been set up by his prints, his gear, his presence in the rooming house, and now he'd been sent down to get beer. The conspirators could make up the bundle while Ray was gone and he'd be easily caught at the scene. But Ray had noticed that a tire was low and had gone off to get it pumped up, and new witnesses could prove it, but the killers didn't know that, and they were watching the motel, and out came King, and the hit man said something like, "There's the son of a bitch now, go drop the bundle," and the wheel man dropped it at Canipe's, but the hit man couldn't shoot just then, because King was with somebody on the balcony, looking straight at them, and he waited a minute and then King was alone, and the hit man blew him away. They peeled off in the Mustang. *That* was the car Canipe saw, and a bit later, Ray went back, saw the confusion and took off, having figured out that he'd been set up. One bit of proof is that Canipe once said the bundle was dropped about five minutes *before* the 6:01 shot. Certainly, Ghormley would say there was nobody in the parking lot. The killers were gone.

Here, then, is the outline of a possible defense for Ray. It has never been tried in a court. No jury has heard what Canipe now believes, or decided whether Ghormley's recollections mean the killers could have been in the parking lot or that they couldn't.

There is also the tale told by a derelict named Harold "Cornbread" Carter, who said he was drinking in the yard behind the rooming house when he saw a rifleman shoot, pull the stock off the gun, drop it and run off. Or that of King's chauffeur, Solomon Jones, who, from his position in the courtyard of the Lorraine just below the balcony, said that in the shot's echoes he'd seen a man, his head cloaked by a white sheet or hood, in the dense bushes facing the Lorraine above Mulberry Street, who then sans sheet emerged to disappear into the gathering crowd (people remembering the white sheet said to have been found in Ray's car think that intriguing).

There are accounts spread by a Memphis lawyer and former newspaper reporter named Wayne Chastain that a mysterious "advance man" visited the Lorraine and arranged for King to stay in a second-floor room instead of the usual ground-floor room.

Chastain also, in an interview with Ray, seems to have elicited yet a third account of where he was during the shooting. Raoul gave him $200 and told him to go to a movie (not to Jim's Grill), but he had seen the vexing tire and went to have it fixed, and at 6:05 was on his way back when he saw an ambulance pass (presumably with King), and then he saw the mob scene and split.

Two older stories suggesting a conspiracy have recently been joined to another theory engendering a King-CIA-Cuba-Dallas mongrel reminiscent of John Kennedy. A week after the killing, a man calling himself Tony Benevitas told a Memphis attorney that his roommate had killed King for money with a .30-caliber rifle from the wall behind the rooming house and then gotten away on a motorbike. The man struck the attorney as believable, especially since, like a real mobster, he knew that the best place to conceal a pistol was in the small of the back. The man said he was from New Orleans but was headed for Brownsville, Tennessee, to meet a Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan. The same day, a man calling himself J. Christ Bonnevecche told two ministers that a man named Nick had killed King for $20,000 for a well-known fraternal order, that he himself worked for the Mafia and was now on the lam over some lost money. He showed the ministers a counterfeit traveler's check and how his fingerprints had been filed off, and then said he was off for Brownsville. Queer as these stories seemed, they were regarded mainly as more of the "I did it" embroidery with which well-publicized murders are decorated. Now it's suggested that these two sinister men with the similar names may be one sinister man named Jack Youngblood, a

former mercenary for Castro, a man alleged to have discussed gunrunning with, of all people, Jack Ruby, and a man whose friends think he had ties to the CIA. Youngblood, it's theorized, participated in the conspiracy, perhaps Raoul's, that killed King. He's reportedly been identified as the man who ordered eggs and sausages at Jim's Grill about 4:30 the afternoon of the murder, then left about five P.M. The Memphis police supposedly then questioned Youngblood but released him. Ray's attorney in Memphis, Robert Livingston, is said to believe Youngblood was the hit man for some agency of the Federal Government. But no one has yet shown that Youngblood-Benevitas-Bonnevecche are one, or whom this multiphasic personality worked for. Not a scintilla of evidence yet points to Youngblood as anything but one of those dark presences hovering around Cuban exiles during the palmy days when the CIA was waging its own little war on Castro.

The Youngblood story, predictably, is not the only farfetched tale. For a time, attorneys Bernard Fensterwald (who has lately acted as Ray's chief counsel) and Livingston were taken by the story, related in spy-story meetings, of a convicted confidence man named Clifford Holmes Andrews, who said he could say who killed King. A hint: It was two men, hired by four wealthy whites. Fine, except that Andrews next told CBS it was Raoul and members of the Quebec Liberation Front, again, employed by four rich racists. And except that Andrews was in a Canadian jail from March 1968 until long after King was killed. Then there's another prisoner, a young accused dope dealer named Robert Byron Watson, who has said he overheard his employers at an Atlanta art gallery plotting King's assassination. It's also been reported that six months before the murder, a group of people visited a jail in Atlanta, looking for inmates to help murder King. Meanwhile, back in Tennessee, a black businessman named John McFerren came forward right after the killing to say he'd overheard a white man in a produce house in Memphis, about five P.M. on April fourth, say over the telephone, "You can shoot the son of a bitch on the balcony . . . you can pick up the five thousand bucks from my brother in New Orleans." Still another man said, a day or so before April fourth, that he'd heard men in Baton Rouge plotting King's death.

It could be that the last two rumors, even if unfounded, are correct geographically. As with John Kennedy, many strands of the Ray yarn knit together in Louisiana, especially in New Orleans. Ray told Huie he was there meeting Raoul, and it's been established that he did visit New Orleans in December 1967 and again on his way to that fateful appointment in Memphis. (Not incidentally, it's been asserted that the FBI flew some Viceroy cigarette butts found in Ray's car to New Orleans for analysis, causing some to wonder if, since Ray didn't smoke, Raoul did.)

Further, Ray often has said he gave Foreman two Louisiana telephone numbers, so that the lawyer could contact people, presumably including Raoul, who knew something about the murder. Foreman says he clearly remembers only one number, in New Orleans, and he found the phone disconnected. In December 1973, Ray filed a $500,000 suit against the state of Tennessee, in which he alleged that Foreman had failed to investigate these numbers, while another attorney—by then conveniently deceased—had looked up the phone numbers and found that one belonged to a Baton Rouge "parish official under the influence of a Teamsters Union official" and the other to "an agent of a Mideast-oriented organization disturbed because of Dr. Martin Luther King's reported forthcoming, before his death, support of the Palestine Arab cause." But Ray's suit did not name the individuals or list the numbers. It did not say what connection these people had to the case or the source of the information on the union officer and geopolitics (some think his lawyers fed him this data). The suit, typically, created more mystery, as it may have been designed to do. In the meantime, the telephoning went on. Another number—the one Ray, according to Charley Stein, had dialed often on their trip to New Orleans in December—was purportedly secured from Stein by a West Coast reporter. Early in 1969, the newsman said he called the number and was answered by a voice that identified the location as a Louisiana State Police barracks. The reporter asked for Raoul and, in sheer implausibility, one answered: Raul Esquivel, Sr., a highway patrolman apparently stationed at 12400 Airline Highway, Baton Rouge. However, no connection between this Raul and Ray's shadowy accomplice has ever been found, and the number could have been planted with Stein, or even with Ray.

Baton Rouge is interesting, though, at least to people who believe in a conspiracy. The state capital was a stomping ground for Leander Perez, the legendary Louisiana power broker who once publicly wished King were dead. Perez had strong allies among organized labor. One reputedly was Edward G. "Whitey" Partin, the former Louisiana Teamsters official who once told Justice Department investigators that Jimmy Hoffa had threatened to have Robert Kennedy killed. And Partin, it's alleged, had an associate who closely resembled the man Grace Walden described as being in the hall at 422½ Main Street: "Small-bone built. He had on an Army-colored hunting jacket unfastened and dark pants. He had on a plaid sport shirt. His hair was salt-and-pepper colored." Conspiracy fanciers quickly recall the field jacket supposedly found in Ray's car that, like other items, was too small for him. They seize, too, on rumors that this man—another shrouded figure—hung around Perez' followers and *mafiosi* from New Orleans. Yet any role in King's assassination by this unnamed man, or the

"All right, but you can't wear them outside, only in the house."

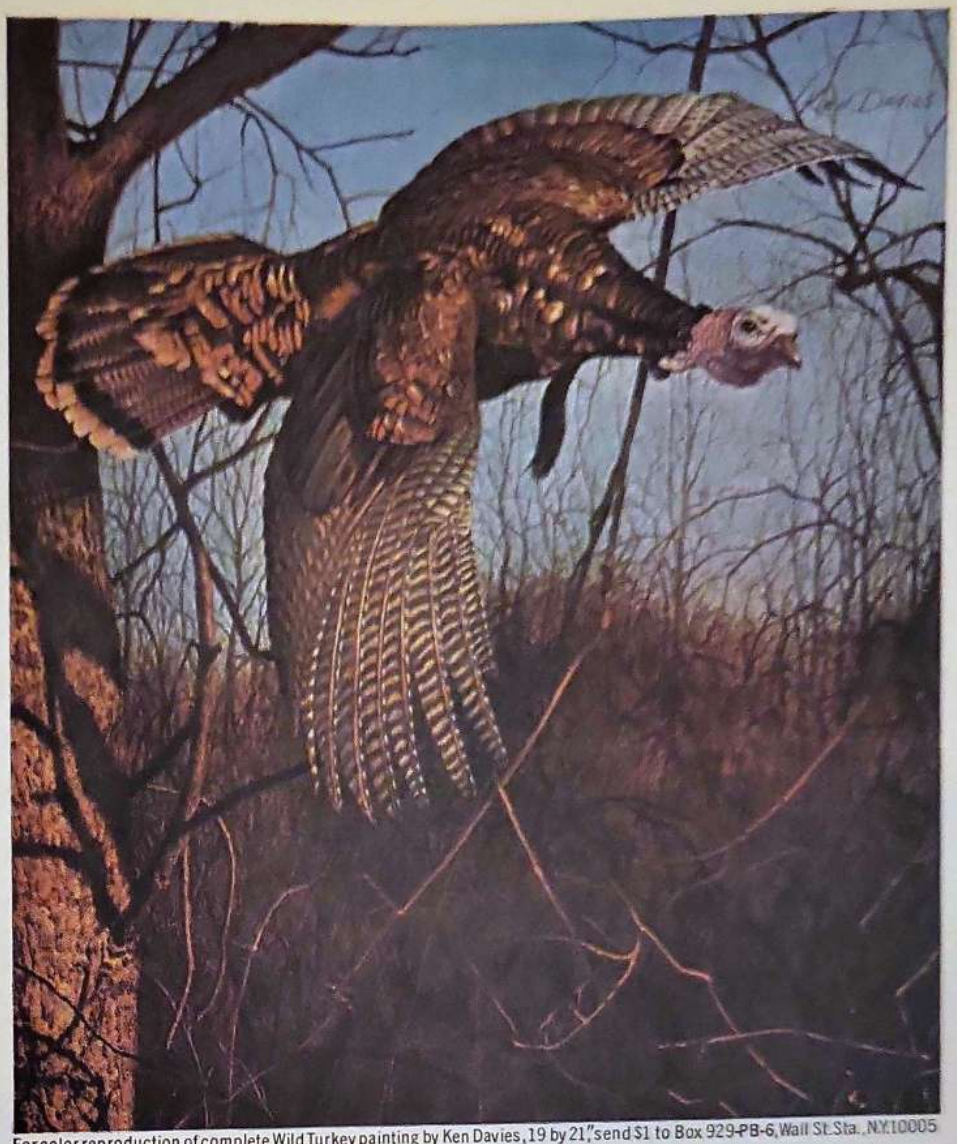
Mob, or Perez, or Partin, remains strictly conjectural.

Not so tenuous is the Teamsters hypothesis. It was, after all, a labor dispute that took King to Memphis. A dispute by a black union. Men who drove trucks on their sanitation rounds. It's conceivable that in an atmosphere of hate and turmoil, two or three angry union men could, in a Yablonski reaction, decide to take out this superspade, this Communist, who was leading people who wanted to get their jobs, worse, get so high on the ladder that folks wouldn't judge just by color anymore. Yes, that's feasible; but again, there is no proof. Only rumors, speculations, thick as flies around a battlefield corpse and as various in their directions. Everyone is suspect and, like the echoes from Dealey Plaza, the murder's mad music goes on and on.

Would a new investigation help stop the carrousel? As we go to press, it is reported that the Justice Department's civil rights division will ask Attorney General Edward H. Levi to appoint an independent non-Governmental panel to study King's assassination and to decide whether a new full-scale investigation should be made. The recommendation comes, it's said, because Ray's motives and activities have not been fully explained and because, even though an extensive review of the original FBI investigation has revealed no Governmental involvement in the murder, there remain questions. We agree. Certainly, the official explanation is doubted, with 80 percent of Americans joining Coretta King and Ralph Abernathy and Jesse Jackson in thinking King fell to a conspiracy. Certainly, there still are worthwhile leads to investigate, witnesses to call, stories to assess, maybe even truths to find. The best witness—James Earl Ray—is available. He seeks a trial, though he has said he won't help solve the crime by naming conspirators. Shouldn't Ray's various protestations of innocence be tested in a courtroom, where his advocates and the state's can address the fundamental question of who killed Martin Luther King?

Nothing less, surely, would have satisfied King himself. It was for justice he had lived and died. The wooden casket, shiny in the thin April sunlight, the plain wagon and the brace of plow mules slowly bearing his body to his grave should have imbued us with that simple imperative. Apparently, we lost that message in the haze of time's slow burning. Or maybe it was only that we could no longer feel, so many were the blows. Martin Luther King's accused assassin had not even been caught before another American leader was murdered. This time, he was white. Again, he was a Kennedy.

This is the sixth in a series of articles on political assassination in America.



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